

Rev. Donato Infante III STL
St. Joseph Catholic Church and Diocesan Young Adult Retreat
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“Be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and put on the new self,
created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

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People often say they are embarrassed about coming to confession again and again with the same sins. On one level, it's probably better that way. Could you imagine how disheartening it would be if every time we went to confession we had new sins?

These same people leave confession having told me, “Father, I just need to try harder.” And maybe that is true for some people. Some people admit to having made zero effort to change since their last confession, and others love their sins and need to actually have a conversion of heart. But most people who regularly confess, the ones who say they are embarrassed, are discouraged because they are trying again and again and keep failing. So they resolve once more, “I will try harder.”

Of course, what proceeds out of us starts within us, in our heart, and what is in our heart, first starts in the mind. Take for instance the fall of Adam and Eve. The Serpent did not just keep dangling the fruit there before them. He had to convince them, and it all began with a lie, with a thought. “Did God *really* tell you not to eat of *any* tree in the garden?” Please note that the thought that arose there came from not from within Adam and Eve, but from outside them.

I will give some other examples that our common topics in the confessional, but remember, what I am saying presupposes living a life of grace, frequently praying and receiving the sacraments. We think of the observation, “What that man did was wrong” or “That woman is beautiful.” These observations are true and therefore good. Then, the Evil One presents what we call intrusive thoughts, or *logismoi* as the Greeks say. This is the lie presented to us coming from the Father of Lies. It's when “what that man did was wrong” spontaneously becomes, “I am better than him” or “He is a bad man” or when “she's beautiful” becomes, “You know what I'd like to do to her.”

Let me state clearly that these passing thoughts are not yet sins. They remain on the level of temptation, *but* what we do with these thoughts can lead to sin if we dwell on them or consent to them. We might think internally judge someone over and over again. We might lustfully think about that woman. To defeat them, we change our thinking. We don't argue with the Devil, as we will lose, but we reject the thoughts.

For example, the Evil One may present those thoughts to us, "He's a bad man," and we reject it immediately by thinking, "No, I don't know that. I cannot judge him. Maybe this was a one-time incident. I hardly know him." Having the passing thought is not the sin. Consenting is the sin.

Sometimes it seems like the thoughts do arise within ourselves, like when we think, "I am feeling annoyed by that person's actions." That's an observation. The intrusive thought is when it quickly changes to, "That person is annoying me" and then "he deserves to know how I am feeling. Give it to him." What happens? We yell at the man because our thinking leads directly to our action.

Instead, we changing our thinking, and we don't yell at him. "I'm annoyed because this is my pet peeve. That person does not know that. I will let them know how I feel, by asking firmly yet nicely to not do that to me again."

The difference between consenting in a way that involves sin and using the thought in a way that leads to good is in the mind because the mind instructs the will. Such "re-programming" takes new eyes, looking at situations with the eyes of Christ, and a mind renewed by the Spirit, as St. Paul speaks about today. Because we are imperfect, there will be times when we fail to resist these thoughts and give in, either because we act quickly without thinking or reason incorrectly or reason correctly but then are overtaken by our passions and forget what we reasoned out. However, in general, this process of renewing our minds in Christ, of putting on his mind, is how we conquer the temptations that plagued us and grow in the areas of our lives that we desire to change. This is how we move from losing our patience sixteen times last month to three times. It is not just a matter of trying harder. It is a matter of thinking differently.

May God bless you.